



## Cave Survey Synopsis

March 8, 2013

### Team members:

Dan Austin (trip leader)

Kelly Mathis

Marc Ohms

Chris Pelczarski

This trip was to the Financial District of Jewel Cave, which was originally explored and mapped in 1968 by Herb and Jan Conn. Southeast of the Counting House, the Conns had crossed a traverse using rope, pitons, and long slings, and had found an upper-level passage that they named the Inflationary Loft. Near the end of the loft, they discovered a pit that they didn't have enough rope to explore.

Beckoned by this unexplored pit, cavers visited the traverse on [February 10, 2013](#) and determined what gear would be needed to cross it. On this trip on March 8, a team returned with the necessary gear, excited to finally discover what was at the bottom of the pit beyond.

Kelly set up an anchor near the edge of the traverse, on a ledge about 50 feet above the floor, and belayed Chris as he led the aid climb. Chris worked his way across the traverse by placing climbing gear in a small crack, then stepping into ladder-like webbing slings, or "aiders." Chris was eventually able to lift himself up onto a narrow ledge and step across, becoming the first person in 45 years to enter the passage on the far side.

The team set up a tensioned traverse line, and the rest of the group followed Chris across the ledge by clipping their harnesses to the rope and walking



Chris crosses the Fiscal Cliff, while Kelly belays him. (NPS Photo)

across. Staying true to the Financial District theme, the team called the traverse "The Fiscal Cliff."

The cavers proceeded up the Wage Price Spiral into the Inflationary Loft, arriving at the unexplored pit in short order. The team rigged a 150-foot rope for the drop, and Marc volunteered to be the first one down to check it out. He rappelled about 30 feet to the bottom and reported that the passage continued.

The rest of the team followed, surveying the new discovery as they went. The passage at the bottom became larger and larger as they continued, averaging about 20 feet tall and 10 feet wide. The

group decided to call this “Sequestration Hall,” as it is about 5% smaller than they had expected.



Marc starts the rappel into Sequestration Hall. (NPS Photo)

Eventually, Sequestration Hall drops over a sloping ledge into another pit. Marc went part way down and reported that the team would need another rope to make the descent. Luckily, they had an extra 100 feet of rope at the bottom of the first pit, so this was used to make the second drop. At the top of this drop, the ceiling of Sequestration Hall rises to more than 80 feet. The pit depth is 37 feet, making the entire passage more than 117 feet tall!

At the bottom, the team discovered that the passage appears to continue at a higher level, but it was not possible to climb up at this point. The group backtracked, checking for anything they might have missed. Along one of the walls, Kelly

found a low crawlway which they began surveying. This appears to be an old stream passage, with mud banks on either side. At one point the passage forced them into a tight squeeze that they called “The Penny Pincher.”

The passage opens into a larger room with two more passages branching in opposite directions. To get into them, the team had to use a length of webbing as a hand line and foot loop. In one direction, the passage continues down a low crawl, emerging in the wall of Sequestration Hall high above the floor. In the other direction, the stream passage continues to meander through the mud banks before ending in a moderately sized room. Thinking this was the end of the survey day, the team called this “The Buck Stops Here.”

On the way back to the Inflationary Loft, Chris climbed up into the ceiling and discovered a new loft above Sequestration Hall. The team surveyed it and found that it was only about 100 feet long, so they called it “Debt Ceiling Loft.”

The cavers systematically checked all remaining leads on the other side of the Fiscal Cliff so the traverse would not need to be repeated in the future. At the final lead, at the end of the day, Chris discovered another unclimbable pit, heading back to the southeast. They were short on time, so didn’t get a chance to explore it. They left 150 feet of rope for the next trip, and exited the cave. 659 feet were surveyed on this 10.5-hour trip, and the 165th mile was reached!

***The current length of Jewel Cave is 165.09 miles.***

**New Jewel Cave Survey**  
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— New Survey

Elevator Entrance

Enlarged Area

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Enlarged from above

